

7 February 2024

**131st Maine Legislature's Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry**

**LD2188: Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Chapter 26: Producer Margins, a Major Substantive Rule of the Maine Milk Commission**

Chair Ingwersen, Chair Pluecker and esteemed members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee I want to thank you for your time spent on consideration of the bill before you, LD 2188: Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Chapter 26: Producer Margins, a Major Substantive Rule of the Maine Milk Commission. As a dairy veterinarian, dairy farmer, owner of several agricultural and dairy businesses, and proud mom and raiser-upper of the next generation of Maine dairy and agricultural producers (4 of them, ages 16,15,13 &11) I strongly urge you to accept the recent Cost of Production Study and adopt its findings as part of the Tier Program.

After 19 years here in Maine as a Dairy Veterinarian, I have seen the dairy landscape, my practice, and the very make-up of the dairy community change drastically. When I first arrived here in Maine there were more clients/farms and they were more closely and densely located. In the almost 2 decades that have passed I have seen those dairies that employ a veterinarian weekly are farther apart and require more travel time to get to. Bovine Practitioners like myself are integral to herd health and therefore the fiscal wellbeing of the dairy farms and farmers who are our clients. As crucial as we are to the success of Maine's dairy farms and the health of their herds, Bovine Practitioners like myself need to have a viable client base: sound, healthy dairies earning a living.

While the businesses and farms my husband and I own and operate strive to provide a livable wage for our employees, benefits and meeting inflation with raises, similar to other employers in other sectors, we are unable to depend upon a living wage, an income over the costs of production on our farms. Many of the farms that are my clients and/or customers of our businesses struggle to achieve that above cost of production income level. Many of my clients and our customers depend upon a spouse with off- farm employment for household income - income that cannot make a farm whole. My husband and I have seen this and experience it ourselves with our dairy farms. With increases in the costs of nearly every product and service we purchase, the effort to retain and attract the skilled and dedicated labour necessary to operate our farms and businesses, and a pricing system that does not allow for us to capture those increased costs from our market our farms and the stakeholder businesses that serve them are left in a precarious position. It is no exaggeration to say that this is a crucial moment for Maine's food system, dairy community, and overall economy.

The Dairy Stabilization/Tier Program has proven over and over again to be key and instrumental to supporting our dairy farms, and in turn keeping the engines of our economy humming while also keeping good, sustainable nutrition from Maine on Maine tables. The "minimum wage" that the Tier Program provides Maine's dairy farms is not

long in the pockets of the farmers- it finds its way quickly to our businesses and community and our stakeholder businesses are able to keep invested in providing the crucial support our farms need. The Tier Program is integral to ensuring the sustainability of our dairy farms and is one of the best investments the people of the State of Maine can make BUT if it fails to update to appreciate and integrate the more accurate and applicable most recent Cost of Production Study findings it will seriously detriment those it is meant to serve: not just our dairy farms, but the entire dairy value chain, our neighbours who depend upon our stewardship of the land and the good nutrition our cows provide, and the future of doers and dreamers we are raising up who are already crucial contributors to our farm businesses. By supporting the new CoP study findings today you can invest in our future, and for my husband and I, that future goes by the names of Meara, Will, Evie and Audrey.

On behalf of them, I urge you to consider the importance of LD 2188 and the necessity of making sure the Dairy Stabilization Program continues to truly do what it has always intended to do: protect Maine's local fresh, high quality dairy production; support the people and working lands of our dairy community; fortify our economy that is so reliant and dependent upon the engine that is our dairy farms; and most importantly ensure a path forward for the next generation of dairy farmers and service providers, the ones being raised on our farms today and the ones who will find their way to agriculture...if we do the right thing today.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Dr. Erin L. Flood, DVM  
Tim Flood Cattle Company LLC  
Central Maine Dairy Equipment, Inc.  
Clark's Milk Transport LLC  
Flood Brothers, LLC

Clinton "Maine's Dairy Capital"